



## **Interviews – and how to survive them.**

**Often** some of the most traumatic and stressful occasions in your lifetime; we are all aware that the job interview can have life changing implications. So how can you not only survive this pivotal time but show yourself as the best candidate for the job?

**Preparation is key.** Find out as much as you can about the company in question – use a search engine to see what information there is on the internet and ask around your colleagues and friends - if at all possible visit them and have a good look around. Get a feel for the way that they operate and their work ethos.

If you can show at interview that you have a real interest and knowledge of the company then you will already be streaks ahead of those who just turn up to wing it.

**Prepare yourself with questions** that show your knowledge about them - and about the job - and make sure you are able to slip them into the interview. Practice these questions and get them sounding as natural as you can.

**Prepare yourself physically** – yes! Take a good hard look in the mirror. What do you see? Now try and look again from the interviewer’s perspective. Do you fit in – actually this is impossible to fathom unless you already know a fair bit about the interviewer - so the rule of thumb is to assume that he or she is conservative in outlook and will frown on torn jeans, colourful tee-shirts and nose studs.

Indeed, for men – smart dress is imperative – suits for management jobs and smart casual for less important vacancies. Always err on the side of caution and do not go with the attitude of ‘This is how I am if you don’t like what you see then tough’ because you might just as well save your time and stay in bed. Hair should be neat and tidy, recently cut. Nails should be clean and cut. Deodorant/aftershave should be mild and not noticeable. Shoes should be clean, Clothes should be clean and pressed. Teeth should be clean and sparkling. Keep jewellery to a minimum of ring and watch – ditch the medallions, earrings, badges and bracelets – you will be surprised at just what offends or puts off a potential employer!

For women the dress rules are similar (so read the paragraph above) - short skirts are out, suits or trousers are in. It’s a mistake to try and flirt with interviewers; either physically or by the way you dress. So dress conservatively, keep makeup and jewellery to a reasonable minimum. Obvious body piercing may be socially acceptable these days but the interviewer may not find it so attractive. This is not the time to make a fashion statement if you want to give yourself the best chance of success.

**Preparation for the actual interview** should start the night before - make sure that you don't eat garlic and get a good night's rest. Double check the time of the interview and do a test run to make sure you know how long it takes to get there. Arrive in plenty of time and ensure that you won't need a toilet break. Check in the mirror before you leave that all is well and there is no spinach stuck to your teeth or dandruff on your shoulder. Be polite and friendly to everyone you meet in the company.

**Now to the interview itself.** Don't worry, you are now well prepared and confident in the way you look and present yourself. When called in go forward with a confident and firm handshake. (practice with friends – no one likes the dead fish handshake and not many the knuckle crusher or the long lingering one so practice to get it right.) make sure that you have got cool dry hands by hanging them loose whilst you wait.

If offered a drink or biscuit it is often better to politely refuse – you don't want to spill your tea or spit crumbs – so unless you need a glass of water to unstuck your tongue from the roof of your mouth this is always best avoided.

The interviewer may try to put you at your ease but don't be misled and get too relaxed - or cocky. Stay in control. Try and answer all questions concisely and confidently. Try it out at home first and listen to yourself – do you start or punctuate an answer with Ummm... or Errr.../ or with those little pet phrases that mean nothing and can be irritating like 'Well to be honest...' or 'Well I mean...' or 'Well, actually...' and do you end your sentences with other meaningless words like 'like' or 'sort of thing'?

Ask around – do you have any annoying habits like twirling your hair when talking, rubbing your nose, playing with your ears. You should be told!

Try and sit still in the interview chair and keep good eye contact. If it's an interview panel then make sure that you talk to the person asking the question but keep contact with the other members of the panel by occasional glances or nods whilst answering.

**Always be open and honest** in your answers but take a few seconds to consider each question and formulate your response before answering. Think of the reasoning behind each question and how your reply will support your application. Questions about your social life may indicate whether you are an outgoing and sociable individual but may also highlight any interference with your working day. Questions about your current or previous employer may discover how loyal you are or how desperate you are to leave. There are very few times when it's wise to 'rubbish' your current employer.

Unless this information is given during the interview you will normally have time to ask questions at the end and this is the time to ask your pre-prepared questions. You may also want to raise the question of salary and hours. Always a tricky moment and must be delicately put. Assuming that you do actually want the job then you can say; ‘ If I am lucky enough to be considered for this role what sort of remuneration (or package) would you expect to offer?’

The other questions you may wish to ask – What happens next? When will I hear? Is there a Short-listing?

Be aware if the interviewer is trying to bring the interview to a close and do not prolong it unnecessarily but ensure that all your important questions are answered and if you feel that there is an important aspect of your career or expertise that has not be covered then always make sure you mention it. The opportunity is always at the end when you must thank them for the interview. ‘ I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to attend interview and, from what I have learned about the job and your company I would certainly like to work for you and would be very interested in this role – in fact it’s perfect! – because..... ‘

Make sure you shake hands again and leave the room hopefully without tripping up or walking into the broom cupboard.

When you get home immediately write a letter thanking the person who interviewed you for their time and explain again just how interested you are in the vacancy and list the reasons that would make you the ideal candidate – it’s a good opportunity to add any, and there are always some, that you forgot to mention. Send the letter of first class post – don’t email unless you have been given the interviewers personal email address. **Oh... and good luck!**